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A Spectacle of Impotence at the UN: Darfur Security Remains Solely with AU

Khartoum triumphs in preserving the genocidal status quo

By Eric Reeves

Despite glib talk in various quarters of a “partial” or “temporary” success this past week in renewing the African Union mandate for Darfur, the UN’s refusal to move toward urgent deployment of the Darfur protection force contemplated in Security Council Resolution 1706 (August 31, 2006) marks a moment of abject international failure. In the face of obdurate and defiant claims of national sovereignty by National Islamic Front President Omar al-Bashir, the world’s most powerful nations have decided to allow the protection of some 4 million vulnerable civilians in Darfur and eastern Chad to remain in the hands of the African Union—notionally as “preparation” for a follow-on UN force. But in fact al-Bashir and other senior members of the National Islamic Front regime continue adamantly in their refusal to accept a UN force under any circumstances, and remain equally insistent that security continue to be provided solely by the African Union.

This weak, under-manned, under-equipped, and badly demoralized force remains, then, the only source of protection for humanitarians and humanitarian operations in Darfur, upon which the vast majority of Darfur’s conflict-affected populations are increasingly dependent. UN promises of modest additional resources and logistical support cannot transform or even change in significant fashion this failing operation. Recently announced Africa Union conditions for UN support further undermine the prospects for adequate civilian protection (see below).

Certainly the AU has fully demonstrated that it cannot protect humanitarian operations, which continue to contract amidst intolerable levels of insecurity. Aid organizations have already withdrawn from huge (and growing) areas of Darfur, even as the need for food, clean water, shelter, and medical assistance grows relentlessly. After more than three and a half years of devastating violence and ethnically-targeted destruction, the vast majority of conflict-affected populations have no food reserves, no opportunity for significant agricultural production, and no security allowing them to deploy their superb coping skills: they grow more, not less dependent upon humanitarian assistance. And yet further significant humanitarian withdrawals and evacuations are now inevitable. As Jan Egeland, head of UN humanitarian operations, warned in his August 28, 2006 briefing to the UN Security Council:

“Our entire humanitarian operation in Darfur—the only lifeline for more

than three million people—is presently at risk. We need immediate action on the political front to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe with massive loss of life. [] If the humanitarian operation were to collapse [because of insecurity], we could see hundreds of thousands of deaths. In short, we may end up with a man-made catastrophe of an unprecedented scale in Darfur.” (Briefing by Jan Egeland, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, on the humanitarian situation in Darfur Source, from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, August 28, 2006)

Egeland’s desperate plea—“We need immediate action on the political front to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe with massive loss of life”—made no difference this past week: there has been no meaningful political action, merely an increase in rhetorical volume.

Egeland continued in his August 28th briefing:

“Attacks against humanitarians are at an all-time high, with 9 humanitarian workers killed in the month of July alone. More than 25 UN or NGO vehicles have been ambushed or hijacked in the last two months, with one organization losing three vehicles to hijackings in a two-day period. If this continues, one organization after the other will be leaving Darfur because we cannot expose our staff to such unacceptable risks to their lives.”

“[Humanitarian nongovernmental organizations] in North Darfur are largely confined to the capital [el-Fasher]. Again, key organizations feel paralyzed and have raised the prospect of full withdrawal. Hundreds of thousands would then be left without any humanitarian assistance.”

The massive North Darfur military offensive by Khartoum, long in conspicuous preparation but beginning in earnest the very day that Egeland spoke to the Security Council, has already killed and displaced many thousands of civilians, and placed many tens of thousands further beyond humanitarian reach.

Egeland concluded his Security Council briefing by making clear that his words marked the culmination, not the inauguration, of the direst possible warning:

“In the past months I have repeatedly called for attention to the deteriorating situation in Darfur. As you have heard today our warnings have become a black reality that calls for immediate action: insecurity is at its highest levels since 2004, access at its lowest levels since that date and we may well be on the brink of a return to all-out war. This would mean the withdrawal of international staff from Darfur, leaving millions of vulnerable Darfuris to suffer their fate without assistance and with few

outsiders to witness.”

“[The humanitarian gains of the past two years in Darfur] can all be lost within weeks—not months. I cannot give a starker warning than to say that we are at a point where even hope may escape us and the lives of hundreds of thousands could be needlessly lost. The Security Council and member states around this table with influence on the parties to the conflict must act now. Hundreds of humanitarian organizations from around the world are watching what you will be doing or may refrain from doing in the coming weeks.”

This is the context for last week’s international acquiescence before self-serving claims of national sovereignty by a cabal of genocidaires:

“[The humanitarian gains of the past two years in Darfur] can all be lost within weeks—not months. I cannot give a starker warning than to say that we are at a point where even hope may escape us and the lives of hundreds of thousands could be needlessly lost.”

Two weeks after this most terrifying of warnings, and two weeks after Khartoum launched its massive and long-anticipated military offensive in North Darfur, Egeland declared that humanitarian operations in Darfur were “in free fall” (Reuters [dateline: Khartoum], September 12, 2006). And on the eve of this fateful last week of inaction, Egeland could not have been more explicit about what is required: “we need this UN force to avoid a collapse” (Associated Press [dateline: Khartoum], September 15, 2006).

These are the realities to which the international community has responded with various upticks in rhetoric, bluster, and bluffing—all understandably dismissed by Khartoum after many months of similar posturing by the various international actors who might ensure that Security Council Resolution 1706 is more than mere exhortation. Khartoum rightly feels diplomatically victorious, and the regime’s enthusiastic welcoming of the three-month AU extension—indeed, its urging of an even greater extension of the AU mission—serves as a grimly ironic measure of the incompetence and manipulability of the AU force. Khartoum’s genocidaires, despite factitious threats to “expel” the AU, never had any intention of doing so; the regime discerned all too clearly that such expulsion, and the complete security vacuum in Darfur that would have ensued, was the only possible catalyst for international action. Absent that catalyst, Khartoum was confident—and deservedly so—that there would be no more than further exhortation, even in the face of the most outrageous defiance.

Context for Khartoum’s Obduracy

In understanding the implications of Khartoum’s continuing obduracy, we must

bear in mind that a pattern of increasing violent human destruction, displacement, and humanitarian need has been clearly in evidence for over a year—a period of time during which security for humanitarian operations in Darfur has steadily deteriorated, even as Khartoum has continued with a pattern of obstruction, harassment, and intimidation of humanitarian workers.

Beyond this yearlong pattern of deterioration, a precipitous rise in violence occurred following the signing of the deeply flawed Darfur Peace Agreement by Khartoum and one (the least representative) rebel faction in May 2006 (Abuja, Nigeria). The August military offensive launched by Khartoum's regular forces and Janjaweed militia in North Darfur (and increasingly in Eastern Jebel Marra in West Darfur) was many weeks in the making, and conspicuously obvious to all observers. The failure of Khartoum to meet (in meaningful fashion) any of the key security deadlines stipulated in the Darfur Peace Agreement should also have signaled to even the most optimistic believers in the agreement that the regime's genocidal military ambitions were far from extinguished.

The United Nations and the international community as a whole—in failing to act despite the clear evidence of many months—have preserved the genocidal status quo in Darfur. The African Union mission in Darfur is a force that is deteriorating rapidly in the field, offers painfully little protection to civilians and humanitarian operations, and is powerless to halt or even report adequately on Khartoum's widening military offensive, which entails the ongoing, indiscriminate bombing of civilians targets (see UN human rights report below).

Instead of moving to deploy as rapidly as possible the UN protection force (17,300 troops, 3,300 civilian police, 16 Formed Police Units), the UN has offered the African Union very modest equipment and logistical support. It is extremely unlikely that this offer will produce any significant or timely augmentation of AU capabilities. We should also recall, by way of example, the fate of 105 armored personnel carriers offered to the AU by Canada in summer 2005: they languished from July to November in Senegal because Khartoum refused to allow their entrance into Darfur, and then admitted them only without their key armaments (12.7mm mounted machine-guns). And given Khartoum's relentless history of obstructing the AU, imposing curfews, restricting flying time, denying fuel to AU aircraft—indeed, commandeering AU fuel for its own military aircraft—there is simply no reason to believe that the AU force will change in character.

Moreover, although the AU has promised to strengthen its mandate, there is no evidence that the organization has the potential resources to make good on this promise:

“AU peacekeepers also intend to broaden their rules of engagement so they can protect civilians more efficiently in Darfur. Under their new ‘concept of operations,’ peacekeepers would not only monitor violence and investigate incidents, but also actively interfere to prevent attacks on civilians by the multiple rebel groups and pro-government militias that plague the region.”

“The AU's spokesperson in Sudan, Nouredinne Mezni, said these new operational rules would enable peacekeepers to better implement the Darfur Peace Agreement signed in May between Khartoum and the main rebel group. ‘With our current resources, we don't really have the means to fully implement the peace agreement,’ Mezni said.” (Associated Press [dateline: Khartoum], September 24, 2006)

But these “resources” are simply not available to the AU, nor could they be absorbed effectively from “first-world” military sources such as NATO, except on a very modest scale. And we have heard brave and foolish words about “mandate” from AU leaders before. For example, Jean-Baptiste Natama, a senior AU political official, declared in late 2004:

“If the situation is getting worse, we are not going to pack our luggage and leave Darfur.... We are going to have a robust mandate to make sure we are not here for nothing. We should be able to bring peace, or impose peace.” (New York Times, November 29, 2004)

There have been few words more fatuous than these uttered during the entire course of the Darfur genocide.

While the absence of a meaningful mandate for civilian protection has certainly been one of the most conspicuous features of the AU mission, this reflects more than anything a lack of resources, trained troops and civilian police, adequate equipment, communications and intelligence capacity, and leadership. Words alone will not change the overall ability of an overwhelmed and demoralized AU force. Only a much larger, more cohesive, better trained and better-equipped force—guided by a much more effective intelligence capacity—could begin to take on the mandate defined by Security Council Resolution 1706:

“Acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, [the Security Council]

[a] decides that the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) is authorized to use all necessary means, in the areas of deployment of its forces and as it deems within its capabilities:

to protect United Nations personnel, facilities, installations and

equipment, to ensure the security and freedom of movement of United Nations personnel, humanitarian workers, assessment and evaluation commission personnel, to prevent disruption of the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement by armed groups, without prejudice to the responsibility of the Government of the Sudan, to protect civilians under the threat of physical violence, in order to support early and effective implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement, to prevent attacks and threats against civilians, to seize or collect, as appropriate, arms or related material whose presence in Darfur is a violation of the Agreements and the measures imposed by paragraphs 7 and 8 of Resolution 1556 [July 2004], and to dispose of such arms and related material as appropriate.”

Who Supports, Who Opposes UN Deployment to Darfur?

It should be emphasized that the refusal to accept deployment of this critically needed UN force is not one made by Sudan’s notional “Government of National Unity” (GONU): it is a refusal that reflects only the fears and genocidal ambitions of the ruling National Islamic Front (National Congress Party). The Government of South Sudan, including President Salva Kiir, who is First Vice President in the GONU, has strongly and unambiguously supported UN deployment. Yasir Arman, perhaps the most distinguished member of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) to serve in the GONU, recently (September 17, 2006) “confirmed the formal [SPLM] decision to support a UN operation focused on protection and humanitarian aid delivery [in Darfur]” (UN Mission in Sudan “sit rep” [Khartoum], September 18, 2006).

Support for UN deployment also comes from the only rebel faction to sign the ill-fated, ill-conceived Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) of May 5, 2006—the Sudan Liberation Movement/Minni Minawi. Minawi, who is nominally the fourth-ranking individual within the “Presidency” of the GONU, has not yet been consulted in any meaningful way on the issue of UN deployment to Darfur, although such consultation is explicitly stipulated in the DPA. His strong support for UN deployment is in any event quite meaningless. The National Islamic Front security cabal retains full and ruthless control of all policy decisions concerning Darfur; it is a shameful and expedient fiction to suggest otherwise.

The threatened people of Darfur—those most directly at risk from accelerating violence and diminishing humanitarian access—are of course unanimously and desperately in favor of UN deployment, as are the rebel factions that have not signed the Darfur Peace Agreement.

Many other voices, including African voices, have spoken out in support of UN deployment, some even arguing for non-consensual deployment if Khartoum continues its adamant refusal. Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf “hinted at UN intervention without the consent of Khartoum” (Reuters

[dateline: UN, New York], September 19, 2006):

“‘The world must not allow a second Rwanda to happen,’ [Johnson-Sirleaf] said, referring to the genocide that claimed the lives of more than 800,000 people in less than 100 days during 1994. ‘My Government therefore calls on this General Assembly and the Security Council to exercise the Chapter VII authority to restore peace, security and stability to Darfur,’ Johnson-Sirleaf said, referring to the UN Charter provision allowing for enforcement measures to deal with threats to peace and security.” (UN News Service, September 20, 2006)

Nobel Prize-winning Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka, the conscience of Africa, gave an unsparing account of Darfur's realities in a Paris speech (September 20, 2006):

“[Soyinka said] the Janjaweed, the militia accused of waging campaigns of ethnic cleansing in the Darfur region, are the ‘arrowhead of a state policy of ethnic cleansing,’ who have a ‘naked language of racial incitement’ with ‘claims of race superiority, complemented by the language of contempt and disdain for the indigenous African.’”

Soyinka had nothing but scorn for the insistence that there could be no UN deployment without the consent of Khartoum’s genocidaires:

“When a deviant branch of that family of nations flouts, indeed revels in the abandonment of, the most basic norms of human decency, is there really justification in evoking the excuse that protocol requires the permission [for UN deployment of force] of that same arrogant and defiant entity?” (Business Day [South Africa], September 20, 2006)

The Irish Independent reports (September 18, 2006) that, “Survivors of the 1994 Rwandan genocide yesterday marched through the streets of Kigali, calling for the world to take action to end the slaughter in Darfur.” (“Rwanda begs world to bring an end to genocide in Darfur,” Irish Independent [Ireland], September 18, 2006)

An extraordinarily courageous open letter from 31 Arab human rights organizations, in 10 Arab countries, on September 17, 2006, urged

“the Sudanese government to support the arrangements necessary for transferring the peacekeeping and civilians protection missions to the UN, in execution of the Security Council resolution No. 1706 and calling upon the international community and the Arab governments to exercise pressures on the Sudanese government to approve the resolution, together with the necessity to support the African Union troops in the province until its mission is transferred to the UN.” (“Arab NGOs call upon the Sudanese

Government to accept the deployment of UN forces,” Cairo, September 17, 2006, On the Global Day of Solidarity with Darfur, at <http://news.google.com/news?hl=en&ned=us&q=darfur+filastiniyat&btnG=Search+News>).

This open letter complements one signed on September 13, 2006 by a group of “eighteen international human rights, humanitarian, and conflict-prevention organizations,” “condemning the recent violence launched by the Government of Sudan in North Darfur and calling for stepped up diplomatic pressure and for the rapid deployment of a robust UN peacekeeping force” (see full text of statement at Physicians for Human Rights website, http://www.phrusa.org/research/sudan/news_2006-09-13.html).

The letter concluded:

“In summary, we call on the international community to significantly intensify diplomatic efforts with the Government of Sudan while concurrently planning for the rapid deployment of an adequately funded and well-equipped UN force to protect the people of Darfur regardless of the acquiescence of the Sudanese Government.”

Signatories included Amnesty International/USA, Physicians for Human Rights, Refugees International, Aegis Trust (UK), Africa Action, Sudanese Organization Against Torture (SOAT), Human Rights First, Urgence Darfour (France), Genocide Watch, and the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies, among others.

A number of US senators have also spoken out forcefully on the need for urgent UN deployment, including Russ Feingold, Barack Obama, and Patrick Leahy. Leahy (D-Vermont) argued explicitly that the world must be prepared to consider non-consensual deployment:

“Finally, in circumstances like this, the United Nations should be empowered to deploy troops to prevent the mass murder of civilians, irrespective of the stubborn, self-serving opposition of the government of the country.” (Text from Senate floor address by Senator Patrick Leahy on the crisis in Darfur, September 19, 2006).

French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy recently became the first senior French official to declare realities in Darfur to be genocide, and pushed for serious consideration of non-consensual deployment:

“France's Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy has raised the possibility of sending UN peacekeeping troops to Darfur, even in the face of resistance from Sudan. ‘We don't have a right to let these women and children die,’ said Douste-Blazy. ‘Do we go there [Darfur], in spite of [Khartoum's] refusal

to accept a UN force]?’ Douste-Blazy told reporters [September 6, 2006]. ‘That’s not on the table, nobody has asked the question like that. But it’s a real question.’” (Spiegel [on-line], Germany, September 15, 2006)

In the interim, many other voices have been raised, including an increasing number of prominent editorial pages calling for non-consensual deployment of the UN force authorized by Security Council Resolution 1706, including that of the Chicago Tribune (September 18, 2006), as well as the New York Times:

“[The] message [to Khartoum] would be even stronger if Mr. Bush said the US would take the lead in soliciting troops for the UN and recommended making NATO planners available to help draw up contingency plans for a possible forced entry.” (New York Times editorial, September 19, 2006)

The authority and prospects for such non-consensual intervention have been subject to a good deal of ill-informed and tendentious commentary, particularly by British writers in The Guardian. So it is especially useful that Ian Davis (The Guardian [on-line], September 16, 2006) clears away much of the smug foolishness embodied in commentators such as Jonathan Steele, Donald Davis, and Simon Jenkins (the latter infamously wrote in 1994 an essay for The Times of London entitled “Leave Rwanda Alone”):

“The 2005 [UN] World Summit outcome document endorsed the ‘responsibility to protect civilians’ concept, and in April 2006, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1674 on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Resolution 1674 contains the historic first official security council reference to the responsibility to protect: it ‘reaffirms the provisions of paragraphs 138 and 139 of the World Summit Outcome Document regarding the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.’”

Paragraph 139 of the UN World Summit “Outcome Document” could not be more explicit in declaring that the international community must be,

“prepared to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner, through the Security Council, in accordance with the UN Charter, including Chapter VII, on a case by case basis and in cooperation with relevant regional organizations as appropriate, should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities manifestly failing to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity and its implications, bearing in mind the principles of the Charter and international law.”

If these words have no compelling force in Darfur today, then the very notion of a “responsibility to protect” civilians at risk has been stillborn.

The AU as the Indispensable “Fig-Leaf”

Precisely because international obligations to act non-consensually in Darfur are so clear and compelling, there is enormous incentive for various international actors to indulge the fiction that the African Union can somehow, in sufficiently timely fashion, be made into an adequate security presence in Darfur. It simply cannot, given extremely high levels of security affecting humanitarian operations and the more than 4 million human beings the UN estimates are affected by violence in Darfur (a region the size of France) and eastern Chad.

[Although recently elided from virtually all news coverage of the Darfur crisis, eastern Chad and its 350,000 conflict-affected civilians continue to experience severely deteriorating security; humanitarian operations face the same high levels of insecurity as their counterparts in Darfur, as various armed groups surge back and forth across the Chad/Darfur border. The Chadian rebel group FUC continues to be supported by Khartoum inside Darfur.]

The many exaggerated claims for AU capabilities are so patently untrue, and ignore so many of the fundamental shortcomings and outright failures of the AU mission in Darfur, that they must be seen as falsehoods whose motives can only be politically expedient, if variously so.

Presently, the proposal for augmenting the AU includes a modest commitment from the UN to provide equipment, logistics, and a very few personnel; faintly encouraging noises from NATO in Brussels; and an AU commitment to increase its manpower in Darfur:

“AU leaders are finalizing a decision to add some 1,200 new troops to the existing 7,000-strong force, [AU] officials said. Even more soldiers could come if NATO provides adequate material support, and if the Arab League and other international donors secure funding, the AU officials said.”

(Associated Press [dateline: Khartoum], September 24, 2006)

The notion that 1,200 additional AU personnel—of unknown quality or potential for integrating with the current force—represent a significant change in the potential effectiveness of the AU is perverse in the extreme. For even this increase would still leave the AU force at approximately one-third of what normal peacekeeping guidelines dictate for a crisis of this magnitude; and Darfur’s extreme levels of violence, as well as its remoteness and size, argue for a figure at least as large as the proposed UN force of 23,000-24,000 troops and security personnel.

Here it is important to recall that there have been a series of cogent and

sustained assessment studies of the African Union performance in Darfur (as well as a host of anecdotal reports, scathing in their criticisms):

[1] Refugees International, “No Power to Protect: The African Union Mission in Sudan” (November 2005, <http://www.refugeesinternational.org/content/publication>)

[2] Brookings Institution/Bern University, “The Protecting of Two Million Internally Displaced: The Successes and Shortcomings of the African Union in Darfur,” (November 2005, http://www.brookings.edu/fp/projects/idp/200511_au_darfur.pdf)

[3] International Crisis Group, “The AU’s Mission in Darfur: Bridging the Gaps,” (July 6, 2005 <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3547&l=1>)

[This writer has undertaken a synthetic account of this very substantial body of research: “Ghosts of Rwanda: The Failure of the African Union in Darfur” Part 1 of 2, November 13, 2005, at <http://www.sudanreeves.org/Sections-index-req-viewarticle-artid-535-page-1.html>)

and

“Ghosts of Rwanda: The Failure of the African Union in Darfur,” Part 2 of 2, November 20, 2005, at <http://www.sudanreeves.org/Sections-index-req-viewarticle-artid-534-page-1.html>]

The Brookings Institution/Bern study recognized and forthrightly articulated an important roadblock to efforts to expand force size using AU resources:

“As [the African Union mission in Darfur] expands, along with demands placed on the AU from other peacekeeping operation in South Sudan, Congo, and Somalia, combined with security crises at home (Nigeria, Ethiopia), it will become increasingly difficult to maintain [troop] quality [at higher AU force levels].” (page 25)

This problem has not in any way diminished; indeed, given the outlook on Darfur in Rwanda and in some quarters in Nigeria, it is difficult not to conclude that the problem has become even more severe in the past ten months. Certainly confidential assessments of AU personnel in that time have continued to be scathingly, even contemptuously critical. Publicly, on the other hand, tact and expediency have combined to credit the AU with far more than it deserves.

This is certainly not to say the AU deployment has been useless or has not

saved a great many lives; and many AU personnel have served with great distinction and courage. But too many have not. Too many have simply hunkered down in the face of an uncertain future and a very dangerous present, in which AU forces increasingly find themselves targeted by combatants. And as the AU has come to be perceived as having taken sides in the conflict (with the Khartoum regime and the forces of Minni Minawi), violent attacks have increased, and the contempt, even hatred for the AU in camps for displaced persons has also risen. These desperate civilians realize quite well that the AU is serving as the “international presence” in Darfur, and that it is a force woefully inadequate to urgent security tasks.

The African Union force is defined by critical shortcomings in leadership, logistics, communications equipment, transport capacity, intelligence-gathering abilities, timely payment for troops, and administrative capacity in Addis Ababa. There is exceedingly little operating cohesion within this force, assembled as it was ad hoc (it is important to remember that this is the first “peacekeeping” task the fledgling African Union Peace and Security Council has taken on, and it is only in recent months that AU leadership has acknowledged how completely out of its depth it is in Darfur). Moreover, in the field the AU continues to be treated with utter contempt by Khartoum’s military forces; for example, the commandeering of AU aviation fuel has become a routine occurrence, as both the New York Times and Washington Post have recently reported from el-Fasher military air base in North Darfur.

This force simply cannot be turned around, or converted into a success story, even as it is clear the AU is—and should be—the future of peacekeeping in Africa. What is even more certain, however, is that Darfur must not be held hostage to AU political sensibilities and pridefulness.

Many in the AU are of course quite aware of their limitations and Khartoum’s manipulations, and speak with great frustration. The UN’s Integrated Regional Information Networks reports from Tawilla, North Darfur (September 5, 2006):

“Simply the lack of fuel and vehicles, as well as a mandate limited to monitoring ceasefire violations, hampers even routine work. ‘We are too few and not well equipped—it makes me furious. We just patrol, show our faces, and we come back to our base,’ an AU commander said. ‘This is my ninth mission, but I have never worked in a situation like this, in terms of mandate, equipment, and procedures. We only investigate and report when something happens, but we don’t do anything about it.’”

The current and future character of the force was described bluntly by a senior AU official:

“One senior AU official, who declined to be named, said: ‘They will drag it out until the end of the year ... but this is no way to run a peace-keeping operation. Morale is low, we cannot pay our troops and the government makes sure we are unable to do our job.’” (Reuters [dateline: Khartoum], September 5, 2006)

Here it is important to realize that deployment of the authorized UN force to Darfur faces very substantial non-African political obstacles. Russia and China both continue to cleave to their previously articulated insistence that Khartoum must first accept UN deployment, even in the face of adamant refusal by a regime that has launched a major military offensive with clear genocidal features—an offensive that shows no sign of letting up. As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice observed on Friday (September 22, 2006): “Time is running out. The violence in Darfur is not subsiding, it is getting worse” (Reuters [dateline: Khartoum], September 22, 2006). Of course the notion that only now is it clear that “time is running out” is obscenely disingenuous, given the reports that have been available to Rice for months now.

Besides Russia and China, the Arab League has continued to side unrelentingly with Khartoum in its refusal to accept the UN force authorized by Security Council Resolution 1706. To be sure, it proved expedient for Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, while recently in Washington, to accept an account of his meeting with President Bush that “expressed a strong commitment to effecting a transition [from an AU force] to a UN force” (Agence France-Presse [dateline: Washington], September 20, 2006). But comments from Egyptian foreign policy officials, as well as an Arab League that is content to serve as an extension of Egyptian policy views, were clear in their insistence that Khartoum’s consent was essential prior to UN deployment. Mubarak himself is reported as giving this assurance directly to Khartoum’s President Omar al-Bashir during the latter’s recent visit to Cairo:

“Mubarak told Bashir that Egypt supported Sudan’s position on Darfur, underlining that a possible deployment of UN forces could only be conducted with consent from the Sudanese government.” (Sudan Tribune [Cairo], September 22, 2006)

This is the context in which to understand why the African Union continues to defer to Khartoum. Moreover, the AU leadership’s insistence on AU military command and troop majority in any follow-on UN force creates potential new difficulties and clashes with the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, inevitably time-consuming and retarding the urgent planning required:

“Alpha Oumar Konare, the head of the AU, said last week that UN troops were

necessary in Darfur, but said they should come with the consent of the government of Sudan and under African leadership.” (Associated Press [dateline: Khartoum], September 24, 2006)

The Sudan Tribune reports even more fully,

“[Alpha Oumar Konare said the transition to the UN force] has to be done with the Sudanese government’s approval and we have clearly said that even if the UN was to come, the bulk of the troops would be AU forces; the command would be African and the AU political leadership will be there.” ([dateline: Paris], September 23, 2006)

Given the acute limitations in AU troop availability, the lack of cohesiveness that would come with any substantial increase in force levels, and the disastrous leadership—military and political—that has dogged the AU mission in Darfur from the beginning (Nigerian general and former overall commander Festus Okonkwo represents only the most extreme case of incompetence), what Konare outlines here an arrogant formula for further disaster. The importance of troops from African, and Muslim, countries is indisputable; to hold the threatened people of Darfur hostage to ethnic, religious, and political sensitivities is intolerable.

The Price of Acquiescence

There is an irreducible truth in the present historic moment: the UN force authorized by UN Security Council Resolution 1706 could save hundreds of thousands of innocent lives if rapidly deployed with adequate resources for military and security personnel. This force has been blocked by the same handful of National Islamic Front genocidaires that has for three and a half years relentlessly, systematically, and savagely targeted the non-Arab or African tribal populations of Darfur as a means of crushing the insurgency that emerged in February 2003. The ethnically-targeted nature of this well-orchestrated destruction has been documented in numerous human rights reports, assessment missions, and by a wide range of journalists and humanitarian workers. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Crisis Group, Physicians for Human Rights, and others have made overwhelmingly clear that civilian destruction has been deliberate, systematic, and that in countless instances such destruction has been based solely on the ethnicity of those targeted.

Such destruction continues to this very day in the form of indiscriminate aerial bombardment of villages that are predominantly those of the non-Arab or African tribal groups perceived as supporting the non-signatory Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) factions, in particular the Fur:

““Civilians in villages in North Darfur are forced to flee due to

indiscriminate aerial bombardment by government aircraft waging a military campaign against rebel groups,' said Jose Diaz, spokesman for UN human rights chief Louise Arbour. Diaz, citing clashes in the locality of Tabarat that led some 400 people to arrive recently in a Darfur camp, said 'the military campaign against rebel movements in North Darfur that have not signed on to the peace agreement continued through the first two weeks of September.'" []

"Diaz cited reports from UN monitors in Sudan in making the accusations against Khartoum. He said some of the airstrikes have reportedly been carried out by forces dropping bombs from the back of a white plane(s)—appearing to corroborate a claim made earlier this month by Human Rights Watch that the government was indiscriminately attacking villages." (Associated Press [dateline: Geneva], September 22, 2006)

This regime is unwilling to accept any responsibility for such Actions—past, present, or future. Instead, it lashes out viciously, blaming "Zionist Jews," Israel, and human rights organizations for Darfur's catastrophe:

"The main purpose [of UN peacekeeping deployment to Darfur] is the security of Israel. Any state in the region should be weakened, dismembered in order to protect the Israelis, to guarantee the Israeli security,' [President Omar al-Bashir] said. Asked about Sunday's [September 17, 2006] Darfur peace rallies from Rwanda to San Francisco, Bashir said they were 'invariably organized by Zionist Jewish organizations.'" (Reuters [UN, New York], September 19, 2006)

"Sudan's president [Omar al-Bashir] claimed that human rights groups have exaggerated the crisis in Darfur to help their fundraising." (Associated Press [dateline: UN, New York], September 20, 2006)

But beyond this preposterous mendacity, the genocidaires in Khartoum share with one of Shakespeare's greatest figures of evil, individually and collectively, the sense that,

"I am in blood
Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er."

Such men will not be deterred from further genocidal crimes by the threat of sanctions, "targeted" or otherwise; they will never allow themselves to be seized by the International Criminal Court; and they live in no fear of an inevitably dilatory and incompetent deployment of some additional AU personnel. These men will not yield. If the world continues to defer to this defiance of international will, as represented in UN Security Council

Resolution 1706, hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians in Darfur and eastern Chad will die.

There are two brutal truths about Darfur; these are both of them.